DATE: December 1, 2014

POLICY #: SSA-CW # 15-13

TO: Directors, Local Department of Social Services
Assistant Directors of Services

FROM: Deborah Ramelmeier, Acting Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Signs of Safety Implementation

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: In-Home Services and Out-of-Home Placement

ORIGINATING OFFICE: In-Home Services

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Training of Staff in Signs of Safety and Implementation of Its Use

ACTION DUE DATE: December 15, 2014

CONTACT PERSONS: Steve Berry, Program Manager
In-Home Services
410-767-7018
sberry@maryland.gov

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy directive is to provide direction to staff, having attended training in Signs of Safety, in the use and application of this intervention.

BACKGROUND:

"Signs of Safety" (SofS) training began in January of 2012. Since then, the Child Welfare Academy has trained a large number of workers and supervisors in the philosophy and techniques for applying this family engagement strategy in child welfare practice. Signs of Safety is a strengths-based, safety-focused approach that is conducted collaboratively between the parents, children and professionals involved in the case. Its approach fully complements all current practice frameworks, such as Family Centered Practice and soon to be implemented Alternative Response. SofS is one of many intervention strategies. It is a framework from which child welfare workers can engage all persons involved in a child protection case, including professionals, family members and children. SSA is committed to the use of SofS in Child Protective Services practice as a model for both engaging families and ensuring child safety.

As an addition to the use of the Safe-C and the Maryland Family Risk Assessment (MFRA), SSA would like to see all In-Home Service staff trained in SofS and have all staff able to apply the use of SofS in their initial and continuing assessment process with families. Staff who have not been trained are encouraged to participate in the Child Welfare Academy training. Supervisors are encouraged to use SofS with staff in their supervision and oversight of cases.

APPLICATION OF SIGNS OF SAFETY TOOLS

Signs of Safety Case Mapping

A tool that is offered by SofS to engage the family in both the assessment and the solution is "Signs of Safety Case Mapping," using the three questions; What is going well, What are you worried about, and What needs to happen?" This tool maps the harm, danger, complicating factors, strengths, current and required safety, and a safety judgment in situations where children are vulnerable or have been mistreated. The Signs of Safety assessment and planning protocol (and questioning processes and inquiring stance that underpins it) is designed to be the organizing map for child protection intervention from case commencement to closure". (Signs of Safety A Comprehensive Briefing Paper V 2.1 April 2012). Workers, applying learned SofS techniques, will continue to use the Safe-C and mandated Risk Assessment, as these tools work in partnership with the map, complimenting and informing each other.

SSA fully supports the use of Signs of Safety Case Mapping as an addition to use of the Safe-C and the Maryland Family Risk Assessment (MFRA) and encourages all staff to receive training in SofS and the use of Signs of Safety Case Mapping. When applied appropriately, Signs of Safety Case Mapping enhances the worker and family's ability to develop a safety plan that meets the family's specific individual needs and strengths.

Harm and Danger Statements

Asking the three questions and using scaling is designed to be the organizing map for child protection intervention from case commencement to closure.
1. What are we worried about? Past harm, future danger and complicating factors should be identified.
2. What's working well? What are the family's existing strengths and safety/protective factors.
3. What needs to happen? What needs to be in place to ensure future safety.
4. Where on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means there is enough safety for child protection authorities to close the case and 0 means it is certain that the child will be (re) abused.

Three Houses and Fairy/Wizard

In order to successfully involve children in assessments SofS developed several other tools for use. These include the "Three Houses Tool" and the "Fairy/Wizard Tool." The three houses tool takes the three key assessment questions, what are we worried about, what's working well and what needs to happen, and locates them in three houses to make the issue easier for children to manage.

"The Fairy/Wizard Tool uses the fairy and wizard's clothes (which represent what can/should be changed – just as we change our clothes) to explore and write down together with the child, the problems/worries from the child's perspective – or 'what needs to be changed.' The Fairy's wings and the Wizard's cape represent the good things in the child's life, since the wings enable the fairy to 'fly away' or 'escape' her problems; and the cape 'protects' the young wizard and makes his problems invisible for a little while'. On the star of the Fairy's wand, and the spell bubble at the end of the Wizard's wand, the worker and the child record the child's wishes, and vision of their life, the way they would want it to be with all the problems solved; the wands represent 'wishes coming true' and explores hope for the future". (Signs of Safety A Comprehensive Briefing Paper V 2.1 April 2012).

Application of SofS Tools

Workers who have attended training in the use of SofS have received instruction in the use of Signs of Safety Case Mapping, The Three Houses, The Fairy/Wizard Tool and developing Harm and Danger Statements as well as the application of the philosophy of SofS. SSA encourages the application of these tools in the assessment and planning process with families for all trained staff. While SofS does not replace any of the current safety or risk assessment policies, it provides tools and a framework that allows the worker to assess for safety, build on what is already working for the family, and seek solutions with the family, while ensuring safety, well-being and permanency.

Access to SofS Tools

In order to assist workers and supervisors trained in the application of SofS, SSA has made Signs of Safety Case Mapping (4 quads Map template), Safety Assessment and Planning Form (detailed 3 column form_1pdf), The Three Questions (3 questions Map template), The Three Houses (3 Houses), and the Fairy (blank_fairy) and the Wizard (blank_wizard) Tool available on the SSA website. Workers can download or print the forms from the website. All of the forms are located on the DHR web site (go to Social Services Administration, In-Home Services, Forms, Signs of Safety).

Documentation

Workers who are using the above tools should file all completed forms (or copies) in the hard file (case record) but should also, whenever feasible, scan the documents into the File Cabinet in MD CHESSIE.

Technical Assistance and Training

The Child Welfare Academy (CWA) is offering Signs of Safety training on a quarterly basis. Any worker who has not registered for this training shall sign up for the training. CWA has offered the training both at the Baltimore Campus and on a regional basis.

The Child Welfare Academy is also offering ongoing case consultation through a contract with child welfare professionals in a state that has used these tools for over 5 years with much success. If your jurisdiction is interested in receiving ongoing consultation for your staff, please contact CWA staff member, Angela Jachelski, MSW at ajachelski@ssw.umaryland.edu or 410-706-4138.

MD CHESSIE

Workers are directed to scan all paper documents into the file cabinet.
- Scan document and email to yourself.
- Save document to your computer.
- On the **File Cabinet** window, select **New** hyperlink button. The **File Attachment** window will be displayed.
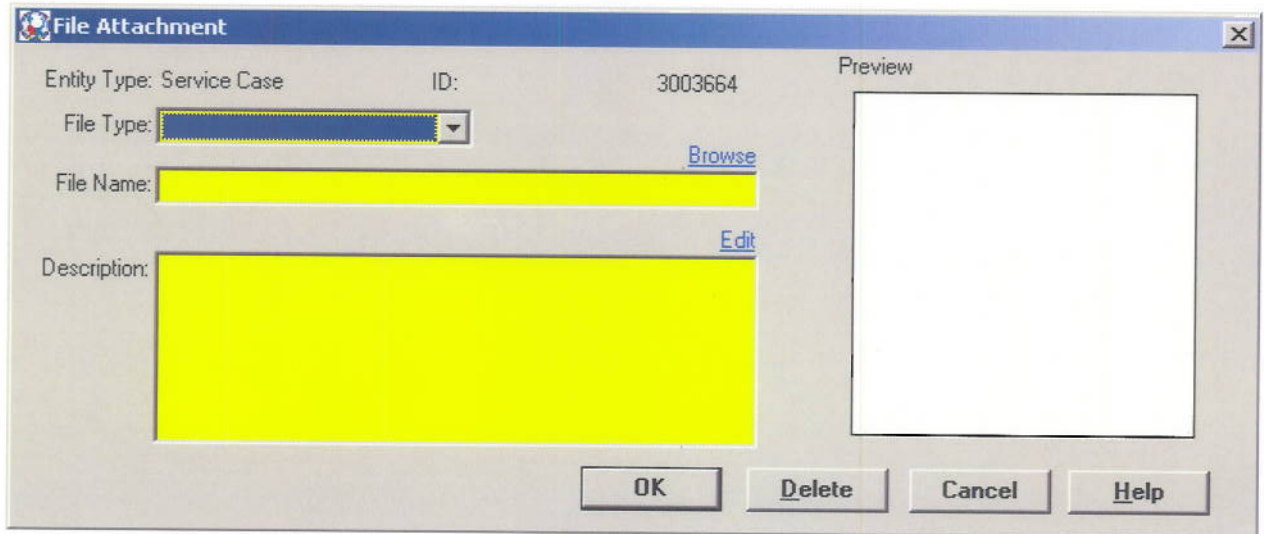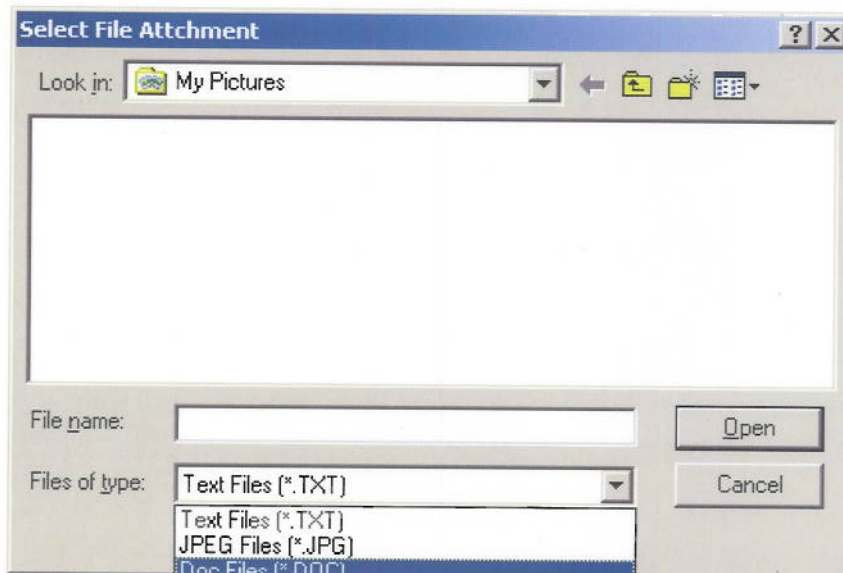
- On **File Attachment** window Select a **File Type, Case Documents**.

- Select **Browse** hyperlink for the **File Name** field.
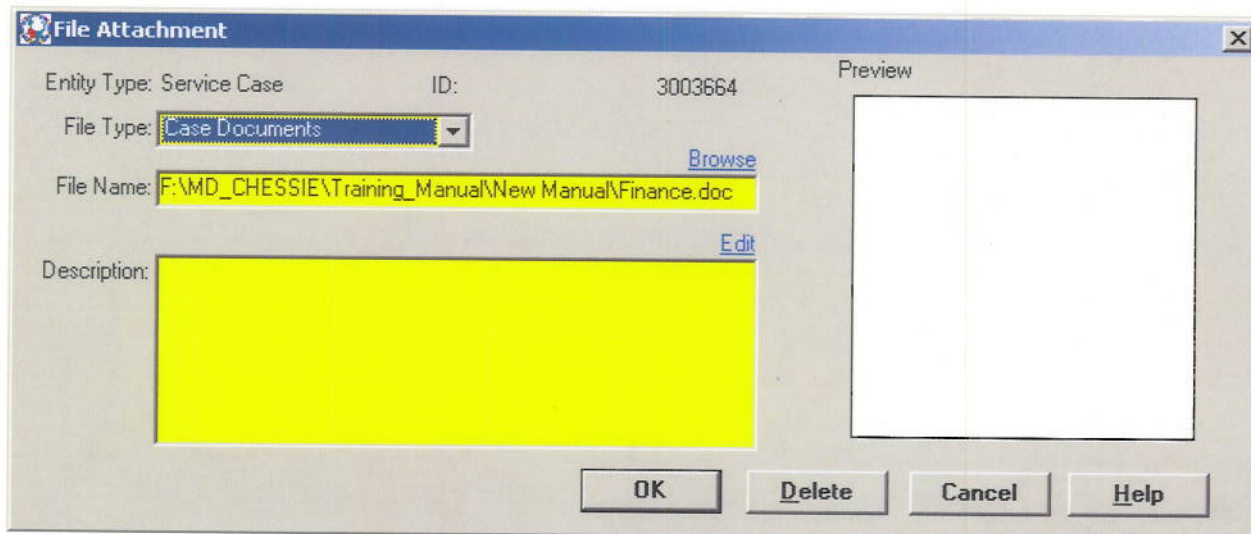- Select the document from its location on the Select **File Attachment** window.

- Change the **Files of Type** to the appropriate file extension to view available files of that type (most likely will be Doc.Files (*.Doc).
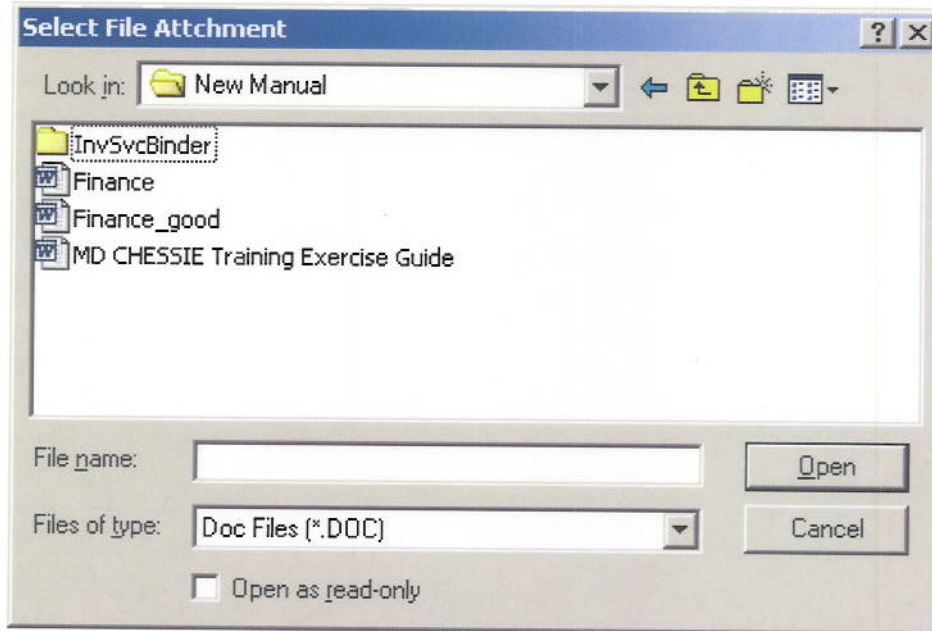
- Select **Open** to attach the file. The file may be viewed in the **Preview** window.
- Write text in the **Description** textbox.

- Select the OK hyperlink buttons to close the screen.